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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2049

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001113

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR ADMIRAL MULLEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: YOUR MAY 14 VISIT TO ANKARA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS
(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Admiral, I look forward to your visit, the first to Turkey by a Chief of Naval Operations in two decades. It fits into work we have been engaged in for over two years to revive mil-mil cooperation that declined sharply after March 2003 and to restore high-level dialogue generally that has produced helpful results on Iraq, Iran, terrorism and other issues. You come at a time of domestic political turmoil, anxiety about our intentions in Iraq and the implications for Turkey, and anger over the PKK. Your staff will have walked through details of our military and naval cooperation, but I wanted to offer comments on a couple of matters.

¶2. (C) On April 24, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) -- a party with roots in political Islam that has held the government for 4 1/2 years -- announced Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as its candidate to replace strongly secularist President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The president is more than symbolic here; he serves as commander-in-chief of the military and wields significant veto and appointment powers. The political opposition boycotted the first round of presidential voting and then complained to the Constitutional Court that a previously unknown quorum requirement had not been met. On the heels of this court appeal, the Turkish General Staff published a harshly-worded warning against fundamentalism (and Gul) that reasserted the military's right to defend the secular state. Days later, the court sustained the opposition's quorum complaint, derailed Gul's candidacy and effectively compelled an early parliamentary election that is now scheduled to take place July 22.

¶3. (C) By Western standards, the military's intervention constituted unacceptable interference in politics. The AKP and many liberal reformers howled that reforms to strengthen democracy here and move away from the country's militaristic/authoritarian history were undermined. Many have also complained that the AKP needlessly provoked the military. A widely carried slogan at a giant pro-secular rally in Istanbul April 29 read, "neither sharia nor a military coup" -- reflecting many Turks' opposition to over-reach by the military and the AKP both. As preparations for July elections get underway, the outcome is difficult to predict, but AKP will likely remain strong.

¶4. (C) Our consistent message after Gul was nominated, following the TGS statement and in the wake of the Constitutional Court's decision, has emphasized our strong support for Turkey's democratic institutions and constitutional mechanisms. We have made clear our agreement with the EU that there should be no extra-constitutional intervention, military or otherwise, in the democratic process. Publicly and privately, we have also urged compromise and pragmatism to avoid confrontation or crisis.

In your remarks here, it will be helpful to echo these sentiments and reiterate US confidence in Turkey and in its boisterous democratic institutions.

15. (C) Iraq remains the single most difficult issue in US-Turkish relations. Ankara supports the President's new strategy, but is skeptical it will work and terrified it may not. Anxieties here about the Iraqi Kurds, the possibility the country might break up, and the implications of an independent "Kurdistan" for Turkish territorial integrity should be seen through this prism. Rising PKK-related violence and reports of more terrorism being planned has led to renewed calls for cross-border action against PKK sanctuaries in northern Iraq. As I believe Gen. Ralston has already related, the military remains frustrated at what it perceives to be US indifference. DCHOD GEN Saygun complained that at a recent CENTCOM conference on Iraq, the PKK was not even mentioned. I will be astonished if CHOD GEN Buyukanit and Saygun do not complain about the PKK and say that time is running out for the US to act. Key messages: we understand, we support Turkey, we are working on more visible ways to show that support through the Ralston-Baser process, and there must absolutely be no surprises in this matter.

16. (u) Thank you for coming to Turkey. I look forward to meeting with you. Best regards, ross wilson

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WILSON